DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 087 CS 508 953

AUTHOR Fischer, Rick
TITLE Rethinking the Undergraduate Public Relations Sequence: Evolution of Thought 1975-1995.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Computers; Counseling; Degree Requirements; Higher Education; Humanities; *Majors (Students); Marketing; *Professional Training; *Program Evaluation; *Public Relations; Speech Communication; Undergraduate Students; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS Curriculum Emphases; *Educational Issues; Historical Background

ABSTRACT

Public relations sequence heads have the luxury of a strong and supportive foundation on which to build a program of instruction. The field has a rich collection of thinking and recommendations relating to public relations education. The Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) conducted a study in 1975 that arrived at the following conclusions: (1) a public relations program should include the arts, the humanities with special emphasis in communication and public relations; (2) a master's degree is highly desirable; (3) the program should be located in a school of journalism or communication; (4) 74% of the coursework should be in liberal arts and sciences and 25% in the major. The report was particularly hard on public relations educators, most of whom had no professional experience. A number of other studies, articles, and analyses arrived at similar conclusions including the 1987 AEJMC/PRSA study, the 1990 IPRA Gold Paper No. 7, the 1991 PRSA Task Force study, the 1992 Public Relations Journal Special Issue, and the Public Relations Professional Career Guide. The major shifts discerned in these studies are away from simple message preparation and towards managing relationships. Marketing and research were added as requirements in the late 1980s. Staff management became a priority in 1992. A year later, computer layout was seen as a requirement for entry-level practice. Finally, the IMC group added counseling to the list of skills necessary for modern practice. (Contains six tables, one figure, and eight references.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 384 087

Rethinking the Undergraduate Public Relations Sequence:

Evolution of thought 1975 - 1995

Rick Fischer, Ph.D., APR

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Fischer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Southern States Communication Association Conference

April 1995

CS508953

Rick Fischer, Ph.D., APR
Department of Journalism
University of Memphis
Memphis, TN 38152

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

Various individuals and groups have thought about how the ideal public relations sequence should be structured. This paper will track the commissions that influenced how U.S. undergraduate public relations programs are structured and evaluated. It is written in outline style to allow curriculum designers to use it as a checklist for self-evaluation. Examples of syllabi from the University of Memphis illustrate one implementation of this sequence.

Rethinking the Undergraduate Public Relations Sequence: Evolution of thought 1975 - 1995

Public relations sequence heads have the luxury of a strong and supportive foundation on which to build a program of instruction. From *A Design for Public Relations Education* (1975) to *Preparing Advertising and Public Relations Students for the Communications Industry in the 21st Century* (1993), the field has a rich collection of thinking and recommendations relating to public relations education.

Perhaps it's because the field is so new compared with other disciplines. Perhaps it's because the discipline's technology and environment change with such finality that so much has been written about public relations education.

This paper will *outline* the various studies so that the reader can see how the assumptions and recommendations change over time. Change, in this case, is characterized more by differences in approach and emphasis than by disagreement over fundamental issues. It is intended to serve as a checklist for program self-evaluation.

1975 AEJ/PRSA Study

J. Carroll Bateman and Scott Cutlip were co-chairs of this seven-person commission jointly sponsored by the public relations division of the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The commission looked at the state of undergraduate *and* graduate education in U.S. schools and confronted the criticism that continues to this day: college graduates can't write.

The underlying assumptions were clear:

1. the public relations program should include the arts, and humanities, with special emphasis in communication and public relations
2. a masters degree is highly desirable for the career practitioner
3. the program should be located in a school of journalism or communication
4. the program should conform to AEJ guidelines with 25% of coursework in the major and 75% in liberal arts and sciences
5. it may be necessary to depart from the status quo in traditional programs.

The commission (Bateman & Cutlip, 1975) was particularly hard on public relations educators, noting:

1. too many courses are "taught by people with little or no experience in the field" (17)
2. most educators lack higher degrees--masters or Ph.D.s
3. too many programs depend on a single instructor to teach the courses in the sequence.

It defined the standards that scores of schools would use in establishing programs. Those standards also became the criteria against which quality programs would be judged (see Table 1).

1987 AEJMC/PRSA Study

William Ehling and Betsy Plank co-chaired this 27-person commission. Like the earlier study it reaffirmed the value of a well-rounded program of the arts, sciences, and humanities. They reported that the most valued courses among practitioners and educators were courses in English and an internship. The internship will show up again in later studies as particularly valued by the profession.

Members put forth the "90 hour rule"--a split of 90 hours (or 75% of coursework) outside the major and 30 hours (25%) in the major. This assumes a 120 hour graduation requirement.

Table 1.

Curriculum recommendations of the 1975 joint AEJ and PRSA commission on public relations education

English--four semesters

Social sciences

Humanities—"a sprinkling"

Natural sciences—one or two courses

Foreign language or area studies

Statistics--one course

Organizational structure and behavior

Communication studies

- Theory and power of communication
- Writing for the mass media
- Copy editing
- Graphics of communication

Plus one or more from:

- Advertising principles and practices
- Media law and ethics
- Feature writing
- Introduction to survey research
- Communication media analysis

Public relations core courses

- Introduction to public relations (not a skill course)
- Publicity media and campaigns
- Public relations case problems
- Internship

Electives

- Management communications
- Propaganda and public opinion
- Magazine editing

At least two courses in a minor

They observed that programs were being housed in journalism, communication, and business schools, but took no stand as to which was most suitable.

Educators were again found lacking in either practical professional experience or an advanced degree. The commission preferred the Ph.D. Educators were told to do research, write, work in the field, and participate in professional organizations (e.g., PRSA, IABC, AEJMC).

This commission chose to recommend course content rather than a list of titles (see Table 2). They also recommended public relations students minor in business.

PRSA is now replicating the original research that gave rise to this report.

1990 IPRA Gold Paper No 7

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) commissioned a study to standardize public relations study worldwide under the chairmanship of Göran Sjöberg. Like earlier commissions they reaffirmed the need for a broad liberal education. They also noted the tension between training graduates to assume jobs at the technician level and preparing them to be public relations managers. Their observations of public relations educators paralleled earlier

Table 2

Recommendations of the 1987 AEJMC/PRSA Commission

Communication studies
• Technical / production
• Historical / Institutional
• Communication procedures / structure
Public Relations Studies
• Principles and theory
• Techniques (writing)
• Research
• Strategy and implementation
• Internship
Additional courses:
• Marketing
• Public affairs
• International, employee, financial, consumer, community relations

studies, but they added one additional point: educators should have strong ethical standards.

The commission proposed a curriculum generally oriented around the public relations process. Table 3 outlines their recommendations.

Finally, they conceptualized public relations education as a "wheel of education" with the public relations core at the center, surrounded by general communication courses, and finally the liberal arts requirement (see Figure 1).

Table 3

Recommendations of the 1990 IPRA Education Commission

Origins and principles of public relations
The public relations field
Public relations specializations
Research
Planning
Action/ implementation
Communication
Performance and measurement
Ethics and law

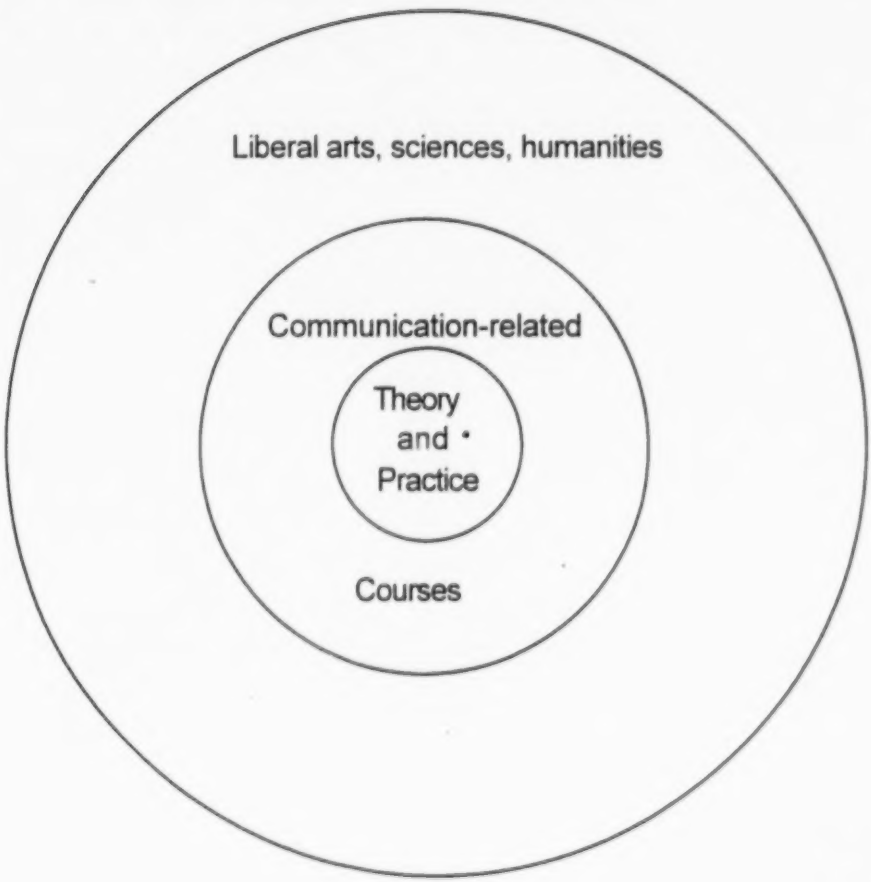

Figure 1. IPRA's Wheel of Education (simplified model).

1991 PRSA Task Force

Phil Lesly (1991) chaired the Second Task Force on the Structure and Role of Public Relations. Educators still were found wanting in practical experience. This group's recommendations were modest:

1. inform high school and community college students and their advisors about public relations
2. invite practitioners into the colleges as lecturers, mentors, resources, members of advisory boards
3. review curriculum periodically
4. interlock college training with postgraduate seminars and other organizations.

1992 Public Relations Journal Special Issue

According to responses from a sample of 384 practitioners and CEOs, the quality of public relations education in the early 1990s was excellent (Turk, 1992). In spite of prior recommendations to get a Ph.D. and more experience, none of the earlier studies actually *documented* poor instruction. Rather, the recommendations seemed geared to raising faculty credibility within the colleges and from practitioners.

Coursework recommendations were general in nature (Redeker, 1992). Colleges should focus on:

- writing and speaking skills
- critical communications planning
- *two* internships
- other courses in the social sciences, especially, human communication, the psychology of perception, learning and motivation, persuasion, public opinion, and mass communication

When respondents were asked to rate the top four courses necessary for a public relations education, they listed writing as most important, with internships second (Schwartz, Yarbrough & Ahakra, 1992). The ranking is shown in Table 5.

Public Relations Professional Career Guide

In 1993, PRSA released the *Public Relations Professional Career Guide*. It used the role typology to cross-classify skills and knowledge necessary as practitioners advance up the career ladder. Five levels led from an entry-level technician to manager. Two more levels define the requirements for director and executive. This analysis allows curriculum planners to look in detail at the knowledge and skills necessary for a person to function at a particular level (see Table 6). Assuming one agrees with the skills required at each level, it provides a cross-check of course content and a way to project the level of preparation the program provides.

Table 5

Rankings of the Top Four Topics for Public Relations Education

Curriculum Content	% rating among top four topics
Writing skills	86
Internship	34.5
Problem-solving skills	29.5
Media relations	27.8
presentation/speaking	26.6
People management	25.7
General liberal arts knowledge	19.9
Social trends, issue analysis	19.3
Research	16.7
Business & finance knowledge	15.8
Public relations case analysis	14
Ethics	13.7
Media production skills	12.6
Campaign planning	12.6
Persuasion / motivation	10.8
General social science	9.4
Public opinion concepts	9.1
Psychology of perception	5.3
Audience analysis techniques	4.7
Leadership skills	3.5
International Business Trends	2

Table 6

Skill and Knowledge Typically Required at Entry Level

Gather information, fact-finding, interviewing
Write news releases
Write news/feature articles
Write for brochures
Write scripts
Write speeches
Write memos and letters
Use word processing programs
Do publication layout
Use desktop publishing programs
Assist with media tours, conferences
Edit, fit copy
Use computer database programs
Assist with research
Prepare information for various media
Supply photography for publications
Produce video programs

1993 Integrated Communication Task Force

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) graduate program director Tom Duncan, Clarke Caywood of Northwestern's IMC program, and Doug Newsom chaired the 1993 AEJMC task force on integrated communication. This 22-member group did not recommend a specific curriculum, but did offer some samples in the appendices. They recommended:

- advertising and public relations students be offered an integrated communication program
- a strong emphasis on liberal arts
- training in oral, written, and visual communication
- solid understanding of business and organizational behavior
- understanding and respect for the other communication disciplines/specialties

In addition to traditional communication skills mentioned by previous study groups, this group recommended counseling skills.

Conclusion

The perspectives of the commissions are more alike than different, suggesting that there is broad consensus on what should be included in a public relations program. The specific

approaches taken by the study groups provide a kind of triangulation of undergraduate public relations education. The major shifts discerned suggest a movement away from simple message preparation and towards managing relationships.

Marketing and research were added in the late 1980s. Staff management became a priority in 1992. A year later, computer layout was seen as a requirement for entry-level practice. Finally, the IMC group added counseling to the list of skills necessary for modern practice.

In the author's opinion, the jury is still out on how much influence the IMC movement will have on public relations education at the undergraduate level. Where it is being applied, it is largely reserved for advanced study in graduate programs. Nothing now precludes integrating communication specialties in a matrix management arrangement. Whether there will be long term realignment of these traditional functions remains to be seen.

REFERENCES

Bateman, J. C., & Cutlip, S. (1975). A design for public relations education (Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education). New York: Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education.

Duncan, T., Caywood, C., & Newsom, D. (1993). Preparing advertising and public relations students for the communications industry in the 21st century (AEJMC publication). Columbia, SC: AEJMC.

Ehling, W. P., & Plank, B. (1987). The design for undergraduate public relations education (Report of the Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education). New York: PRSA.

Redecker, L. L. (1992). Internships provide invaluable job preparation. Public Relations Journal, 48(9), 20-21.

Schwartz, D. F., Yorbrough, J. P., & Shakra, M. T. (1992). Does public relations education make the grade? Public Relations Journal, 48(9), 18-25.

Sjöberg, G. (1990). Public relations education--Recommendations and standards (Gold Paper No 7). London: International Public Relations Association.

The PRSA Foundation. (1993). Public relations professional Career Guide. New York: PRSA Foundation.

Turk, J. V. (1992). Public relations faculty rate well with peers but may get shortchanged on funding. Public Relations Journal, 48(9), 16.